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ABSTRACT

The role of early childhood educator and caregiver is ever widening to include increasing responsibility for social and emotional development. The dramatic rise of violence among school children in recent years underscores the importance of teaching young children how to manage conflicts and resolve interpersonal differences prosocially. This paper draws from current research and grounded theory to build a model for staff development that would begin to address some of these and other complex issues facing the early care and education community as we enter the twenty-first century. Areas identified as professional development needs for early care educators include: (1) knowledge and collaborative networking throughout the children's cultural and environmental systems; and (2) self awareness of the teacher's own social relationships and interpersonal conflict management methods and attitudes. Methods for promoting cultural appreciation and for creating open dialogues with children are illustrated. These methods are internalized more soundly when the teacher has opportunities to reflect and practice in tandem with learning the theory and conceptual framework being presented. The paper concludes by constructing research-based recommendations for Head Start and early care policymakers. The recommendations address transformative staff development models for touching children's lives using webs of relationships and a systemic peacebuilding model. (Contains 43 references.) (Author/KB)

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Transforming Conflict & Violence in Early Childhood Settings: A Model for Staff Development

Abstract

The role of early childhood educator and caregiver is ever widening to include increasing responsibility for social and emotional development The dramatic rise of violence among school children in recent years underscores the importance of teaching young children how to manage conflicts and resolve interpersonal differences prosocially. This paper draws from current research and grounded theory to build a model for staff development that would begin to address some of these and other complex issues facing the early care and education community as we enter the twenty first century. Areas identified as professional development needs for early care educators include a) knowledge and collaborative networking throughout the children's cultural and environmental systems, and b) self awareness of the teacher's own social relationships and interpersonal conflict management methods and attitudes.

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Transforming Conflict & Violence in Early Childhood Settings: A Model for Staff Development

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This thesis calls for paradigm shifts; shifts that transcend the current state of reality; shifts from a culture of violence to a culture of peace. Transformation fits with the notion of a paradigm shift (Reardon, 1989; Lederach, 1997). Both connote systemic change rather than simple updating and extending of existing methods and practices. How does a teacher achieve this state of transformation? Does it occur with one or two in-service workshops on the new subject matter? Is it necessary that a teacher transform her or his beliefs and attitudes in order to be an effective facilitator of conflict resolution? Lessons learned from several recent studies suggest that when teachers feel confident and competent in their own conflict resolution abilities and practices, they are more effective in passing these skills on to the children (Vestal, 2001; Oppfer, 1997; Fine, 1997).

Many consider Head Start and other early care and education programs to be an appropriate setting to incubate such a paradigm shift (Prothrow-Stith, 1991; Goleman, 1995; Herren & Fernandez, 2000; Raden, 1998; Elswood, 1998; Vestal, 2001). Perhaps the teachers and caregivers in early care and education are best suited to be the change agents; they are in daily contact with the children and are often close to the parents, recognizing the home as a vital component (Coleman & Wallinga, 2000). Such a paradigm shift or programmatic change would first and foremost require training and development, if not personal transformation, of those who will usher in the changes (Fine, 1997). A comprehensive professional

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development plan must be initiated in order for Head Start and early care settings to be transformed into channels for peacebuilding.

Teacher training and development needs to include avenues for self-reflection and self awareness of their current knowledge and practices regarding conflict and social justice (Adalbjarnardottir & Selman, 1997; Amodei, et.al., 1998; Fine, 1997; Opffer, 1997, Vestal 2001). Teachers need skills training to teach children how to look at conflict constructively and find resolutions independent of adult intervention when possible (Shure, 1996; Fine, 1997). Administrators, teachers and other organizational staff, could benefit from training and skill building in facilitation, change management and mediation in work settings (Senge, 2000; Umbreit, 1995; Bush & Folger, 1994). Finally, in support of the ecological or multi-modal model of peacebuilding (Brofenbrenner 1979; Lederach, 1997; Byrne & Keashley, 2000), staff need to be trained in models that empower and support the family. These family empowerment models should be extended to the community partners and community programs that touch the lives of the children and families in Head Start and early care settings (Prothrow-Stith, 1991).

Professional Development Needs for Early Childhood Educators

As suggested by Brofenbrenner (1979) in his ecological model of environment, the developing child is embedded in several environmental systems, ranging from immediate settings such as the family, school and community to more remote settings, such as the broader culture which includes mass media, health and welfare systems, and cultural customs and ideologies. An intervention or program to transform thinking and behavior from a paradigm of violence and fear to one that is proactive and prosocial cannot be introduced in isolation. All the various subsystems that interact with the young child must be transformed as well. Family-school-community collaborative initiatives require new types of teacher training models. Teacher

training should include reflective listening strategies, role-playing and attention to interpersonal issues. Reflection and empathy can help teachers develop a sense of confidence which could encourage them to take steps to actively facilitate positive interaction (Coleman & Wallinga 2000).

Adalbjarnardottir and Selman (1997) note that the role of the teacher has widened to include preparation of children for constructive participation in society. Teachers are expected to take on increasing responsibility for promoting their students' social, moral and emotional growth. However teacher education programs tend to neglect the preparation of teachers to work on interpersonal issues in the classroom. Professional development of teachers should allow them to reflect on the way they deal with their own social relationships, and how they manage conflict in their personal lives. Intervention programs should ask teachers to be more self aware of their own needs, cultural biases, and social-emotional assets as well as the social-emotional needs of their students (Adalbjarnardottir & Selman, 1997; Vestal, 2001).

One method for increasing self awareness of conflict attitudes and conflict management style in adults is the Thomas Killman Conflict Mode Inventory, which is a self assessment exercise that looks at conflict management preferences on the dimensions of competing, compromising, avoiding, collaborating and accommodating. Conflict styles assessment instruments, including the TKCMI, are typically based on two dimensions of conflict management: 1) assertiveness or pursuit of the goal, and 2) cooperativeness or preservation of the relationship (Blake & Mouton 1964; Volkema & Bergmann 1995). The *collaborating* style maximizes both the assertiveness and the cooperativeness dimensions by seeking solutions that meet both goal and relationship needs of all parties (Katz & Lawyer 1985). Collaborating for win-win outcomes for all involved in an issue can take a great deal of time, practice and skill development.

Personal Transformation is Key

The tenets of transformational education would suggest that teachers who have an awareness of their own attitudes and beliefs about conflict, violence prevention and peacebuilding are better able to pass on the philosophy of peace education to children (Gandhi, 1958; Friere, 1973, 1997; Reardon, 1989; Boulding, 1989; Schwerin 1992). This construct is one of the underlying assumptions in recent studies across disciplines. A study of Head Start teachers in rural south Texas examined the effectiveness of a preschool violence prevention program in influencing the knowledge and attitudes of Head Start teachers using a pre and post intervention method. Researchers in the south Texas study found that the 6-hour teacher training program in violence prevention does enhance both knowledge and attitudes toward violence prevention (Amodei, et al., 1998). Teachers in the Texas study who had previously experienced violence had higher post-test scores in general knowledge about violence, a finding that supports the notion that increased awareness of conflict and violence as well as methods for intervention and prevention can enhance a teacher's effectiveness in promoting conflict resolution and peacebuilding with the children.

A two year study of conflict resolution and social-emotional skill development in a Florida Head Start program furthers such findings. Head Start teachers enrolled in a 40 hour college level course covering conflict resolution and social-emotional theory and practice which lasted seven weeks. During that time, the teachers followed a curriculum for interpersonal cognitive problem solving (ICPS) with the four and five year old children in their classrooms, which allowed them to put into immediate practice the concepts they were learning. Teachers were interviewed a week before the course began and a month after the course ended. Post course findings showed that teachers demonstrated an expanded awareness of conflict in their lives; an increased level of comfort with handling conflicts; more confidence in allowing children to resolve their own interpersonal problems; and more facilitative, less directive methods for helping children resolve conflicts during the Head Start day (Vestal, 2001).

One of the limitations to evaluation studies of the effectiveness of various conflict resolution program models is related to inconsistent teacher usage of the program. Kmitta (1997) suggests that teacher participation in conflict resolution programming is voluntary, which confounds rigorous scientific research. Taking the "volunteer" aspect further, researchers have found that implementation of the program in a given school may vary from one classroom to another depending on the quantity and quality of time devoted to the conflict resolution program by a teacher (Elias, et al., 1997). Opffer (1997) discusses the need for providing in-depth conflict resolution training for teachers in addition to training on the curriculum model they will use with the children. Such training will enhance teacher's comfort with the material and their confidence in resolving conflicts; thus teacher confidence in personal conflict competence may be key to successful implementation of a conflict resolution program.

Promote Cultural Appreciation and Teach Anti-Bias

Some forms of violence are "structural" in nature (Galtung 1996); these structures may maintain prejudice and social injustice using a power-based model. Competition that results in name-calling and cultural slurs is an example of the kinds of structural violence we tolerate in our society. These are the kinds of hidden, insidious threats that teach bias and overlook bullying in later childhood. Early care settings need to incorporate activities and materials that are designed to increase children's appreciation of their own and other cultures (Vygotsky, 1978; Derman-Sparks, 1989; Fine, 1997; Baucom, 2000). Teachers need to model for children the powerful role they play in creating a peaceful world by instilling love and respect for human nature in the young minds and hearts of children (Bandura, 1977; Boulding, 1989, Reardon, 1989). Caregivers and teachers can immunize children's minds and hearts against the hate and racism they may find in the world outside. If prejudice and bigotry stem from ignorance, it follows that education

and positive experience could be an antidote. Observation and research show that anti-bias practices enhance self-esteem and promote pro-social interaction (Derman-Sparks, 1989; Reardon, 1989; Baucom, 2000).

Dialoging to Help Children Understand Emotions

DeVries and Zan (1994) offer insight into attributes that can enhance the teaching of conflict resolution in young children. They suggest that the teacher can help the children in the process of achieving emotional balance and mental health by facilitating the development of self-knowledge and interpersonal understanding. The teacher should foster development of self-knowledge by helping children reflect on their feelings and reaction tendencies. When children become upset, the teacher can ask children what happened to make them upset. The teacher can acknowledge the children's feelings, letting them know that how they feel is recognized (DeVries and Zan, 1994, p. 73). Drawing from the work of Myrna Shure (1992) in the *I Can Problem Solve* program, DeVries and Zan (1994) argue that construction of interpersonal understanding is a process of de-centering to think about the other's point of view and to figure out how to coordinate it with one's own thought negotiation (p. 74).

The adult can promote cooperation among children by facilitating reflection in interpersonal feelings, consequences and strategies. Shure (1992) specifies dialogs that teachers can use to teach problem solving to children as young as 4 years. In the *I Can Problem Solve* program teachers are coached to use dialogs like the following script that is an excerpt from the program:

> Gary and Evan are upset and crying. Each one says, "He hit me first."
>
> Teacher: We have a problem to solve here. Gary and Evan, let's talk about this. What happened?
>
> Gary: He hit me.

Evan: He hit me first.

Teacher: (To *Gary)* How did you feel when Evan hit you?

Gary: Mad! He messed up my paper. *(Points to the easel.)*

Teacher: *(To Evan)* How did you feel when Gary hit you?

Evan: Mad!

Teacher: Now you're both mad. Gary, do you know WHY Evan messed up your paper?

Gary: He just did!

Teacher: How can you find out WHY he messed up your paper?

Gary *(To Evan)* WHY did you do that?

Evan: 'Cause it's my turn.

Teacher: *(To both)* Ok, what can you two do now to solve the problem so you both won't be mad?

Gary: (To Evan) You paint here (points to left side), and I'll paint here (points to right side.)

In this example, the teacher uses an information-seeking, non-threatening tone of voice and does not spend an indeterminate amount of time trying to find out who wronged whom. Children are encouraged to use feeling concepts, determine the cause of the problem, and find an alternative solution. (Shure, 1992, p. 177)

Prescriptive and Elicitive Teacher Training Approaches

In his work on conflict transformation across cultures, John Paul Lederach (1995) discusses the value and appropriateness of using two types of training approaches: prescriptive and elicitive. In the prescriptive approach, which is exemplified above in the scripted dialog outlined by Shure (1992) and in the ICPS model is a knowledge transfer based training model. The trainees, which would be teachers initially and subsequently teachers transfer the model to the children, are focused on mastering a model (dialoging script) through cognitive understanding of it. According to Lederach (1995),

> The purpose and usefulness of the prescriptive approach lie in its capacity to outline and permit participants to interact with an approach to conflict resolution and to understand and master the particular strategies and techniques it entails. For many people seeking to understand how conflict works and how to better handle it, the model represents concrete ideas and approaches (pp 51-52).

A different approach to training is described by Lederach (1995) as the elicitive approach, which frames training as an opportunity for discovery, creation and refinement of models. Primary emphasis is placed on first discovering what people already know about conflict resolution and from there building upon the knowledge base that exists with the training participants (Lederach, 1995). A trainer or facilitator of teacher's professional development could determine which combination of these two approaches best suits the needs of the group.

In this section, I have suggested a paradigm change in the methods and procedures for training teachers of young children. If we expect teachers to have the knowledge and attitudes to promote children's social-emotional literacy and the capacity to teach them skills in conflict resolution and violence prevention, the teachers need training on interpersonal issues. They need an awareness of their own values and experiences in conflict and conflict management.

Transformative Professional Development for Staff

Teacher training and development needs to include avenues for self-reflection and self awareness of their current knowledge and practices regarding conflict and social justice (Amodei, et.al., 1998; Fine, 1997; Opffer, 1997). Teachers need skills training to teach children how to look at conflict constructively and find resolutions independent of adult intervention when possible (Shure, 1996; Fine, 1997).

Administrators, teachers and other staff, could benefit from training and skill building in facilitation and mediation in work settings (Umbreit, 1995; Bush & Folger, 1994; Senge, 2000). Finally, in support of the ecological or multi-modal model of peacebuilding (Brofenbrenner, 1979; Lederach, 1997; Byrne & Keashley, 2000), staff need to be trained in models that empower and support the family. These family empowerment models should be extended to the community partners and community programs that touch the lives of the children and families (Prothrow-Stith, 1991).

Recommendations for Head Start and Early Care and Education Policy

1. *Design and test models that teach children conflict resolution skills based on interpersonal cognitive problem solving.*

There are many conflict resolution skill-building models available for early care and education (Rosandic, 2000; Bey & Turner, 1996; Kreidler, 1996; Levin, 1995). This researcher has tested and successfully used the ICPS model (Shure, 1992) which is specifically designed for preschoolers, and has not tested or implemented other models except as supplemental curriculum options. Intuitively, my belief is that there are many appropriate models that could be used successfully and that these include published materials available commercially as well as materials that have been "home grown" or patched together by practitioners. It is not necessary for programs to make a large monetary investment in curriculum materials. The ICPS manual for preschool, for example, is priced below $40, and is an affordable addition to any classroom. Training and guidance on how to use the model must also accompany the curriculum materials (Fine, 1997; Opffer, 1997).

The Head Start Bureau and other early childhood policymakers could facilitate the initiation of conflict resolution and peacebuilding models at the program level. Various ways to accomplish this could include:

1) a demonstration project, 2) model programs that could serve as training or mentoring sites, and 3) guidance and consumer information about available models offering a set of criteria to help grantees select an appropriate model. Ideally, the programming models would be supported by a strong research foundation, and would teach alternative solution thinking strategies in addition to emotional literacy and cultural integration.

2. *Develop and promote teacher training in violence prevention, conflict resolution, and peace education that is based on transformative principles*

One of the limitations to evaluation studies of the effectiveness of various conflict resolution program models is related to inconsistent teacher usage of the program. Kmitta (1997) suggests that teacher participation in conflict resolution programming is voluntary, which confounds rigourous scientific research. Taking the "volunteer" aspect further, researchers have found that implementation of the program in a given school may vary from one classroom to another depending on the quantity and quality of time devoted to the conflict resolution program by a teacher (Elias, et al., 1997). Opffer (1997) discusses the need for providing in-depth conflict resolution training for teachers in addition to training on the curriculum model they will use with the children. Such training will enhance teacher's comfort with the material and their confidence in resolving conflicts; thus teacher confidence in personal conflict competence may be key to successful implementation of a conflict resolution program.

Policymakers in state and federal institutions would be well advised to approach staff training and development in violence prevention, conflict resolution and peace education with two lenses. One focus is the format for staff training and development. Clearly, the methods for training teachers must provide the in-depth experiential training necessary (Fine, 1997). One or two in-service workshops may not be sufficient. Secondly, the training and development methods should be based on transformative principles (Friere, 1997,

1997; Schwerin, 1992; Lederach, 1997). Braman (1998) asserts that teaching peace to adults is key to personal and social change, but it requires more than merely training individuals on how to use the prescribed conflict resolution method. "It requires adults to become aware of the assumptions underlying their views of conflict, challenge these assumptions, and consider new ways of thinking" (Braman, 1998, p.1).

3. *Undertake a process for systemic peacebuilding that weaves together the child's and family's webs of relationships and spheres of influence*

For more than three decades, Head Start has been a social institution dedicated to freeing the oppressed... even the words, "Head Start' communicate the idea of giving an advantage to those who want to help themselves get ahead. Paulo Freire (1997) posits that everyone aspires to a basic human vocation to transform their world, and in so doing move toward fresh approaches for enhancing their lives, individually, and collectively. He believes that every human being is capable of looking critically at the world and gradually acting upon that perception. "In order for the oppressed to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform" (Freire, 1997, 31). Head Start's dual track goals, focused on children *and* their parents can provide a vehicle for transformation to a fuller and richer life. Head Start's values and philosophy can and does enrich the lives of the teachers and staff in the local programs in addition to the benefits for children and families. While we may look to Head Start to lead the way, all early care and education programs can aspire to make and value family-school-community connections.

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